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No. 2476.

At the Ribbon Counter

A PLAY IN ONE ACT



BY

GERTRUDE E. JENNINGS



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A Play in One Act

By
GERTRUDE E. JENNINGS

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26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

NEW YORK
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PUBLISHER
28 WEST 38TH STREET

PR 6019
E 54 A8
1919

NOV 26 1919 ✓

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6417.15 Dec 1919

AT THE RIBBON COUNTER

CHARACTERS

MISS HEWITT

MISS GEORGE

A CUSTOMER

SCENE.—*The ribbon department of a small shop.*

The fee for each and every representation of this play by amateurs is One Guinea payable in advance to:—

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AT THE RIBBON COUNTER

The Scene is the ribbon department of a third-rate shop. There is a counter at back and a counter at right angles on the R. with a space in between. Tables may be used for these counters, if the fronts of the tables are filled in by canvas or strong brown paper. Two small cane chairs for customers. Entrances L. and R. On the counters stand rolls of ribbon done up in pyramids and boxes of lace, also baskets of handkerchiefs and stockings.

At rise of Curtain MISS HEWITT is discovered behind R. hand counter. She is measuring and putting away odd lengths of ribbon. She is a bright, pretty girl with fuzzy fair hair and a sharp pert manner.

Enter from left MISS GEORGE carrying a box containing curls of hair. She is a handsome, tall, languid girl. Both girls are dressed in black.

MISS HEWITT. What did your old girl want?

MISS GEORGE (*going behind c. counter*). Pin curls, if you please.

MISS HEWITT. She was a precious long time choosing them.

MISS GEORGE. Couldn't make up her mind which shade of auburn matched her hair.

MISS HEWITT. Auburn? Why, she's as grey as they're made.

MISS GEORGE. That's why it was so hard to please 'er, see?

MISS HEWITT. Silly old fool, wish they knew what we thought of them sometimes.

MISS GEORGE. Ah, indeed !

MISS HEWITT. 'Ave a sweet, dear ?

MISS GEORGE. Thanks, dear.

MISS HEWITT. Don't serpose there'll be any one in to-night.

MISS GEORGE. Ought ter be ashamed of themselves if there is. I've no patience with people who walk into a shop near closing time, messing up the boxes and keeping the girls in. Just as if the whole place belonged to them—such impudence !

MISS HEWITT. Well, it wouldn't break my 'eart ter get away now. I'm as sleepy as what for, that I am. (*Yawns.*)

MISS GEORGE. You were up too late last night.

MISS HEWITT. You're right there. Didn't leave off dancing till four. Shouldn't have stopped then only I broke the 'eel off my shoe. I say, these sweets don't 'arf 'um.

MISS GEORGE. Yes, don't they ? Where are those blue ribbons, dear ? (*Crosses R.*)

MISS HEWITT. I put them away, dear.

MISS GEORGE (*leaning on back of chair*). Thanks, dear. I suppose, of course *he* was there ?

MISS HEWITT. He ?

MISS GEORGE. Yes. The young gentleman you're engaged to. The mysterious stranger.

MISS HEWITT. Go on, Miss George. You're not to tease.

MISS GEORGE. I can't see why you keep it such a secret, I must say. I tell you all about Mr. Nesfield and he hasn't even spoken. So why you won't tell me the same, quite confidential, I don't know.

MISS HEWITT (*embarrassed, crosses to behind c. counter*). Ladies can't always have things just as they like, Miss George. My fiancy has a very important reason for keeping our engagement a secret at present.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, I've no wish to pry, I'm sure. I should be the very last to intrude *my* feelings where they're not wanted.

MISS HEWITT. No offence intended, Miss George.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, naturally not! I'm afraid I must often have bored you with talking about *my* gentlemen friends.

MISS HEWITT. Not at all, I assure you.

MISS GEORGE. I won't do it again, that I can promise.

VOICE (*outside*). Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. Serving!

VOICE. Miss George!

MISS GEORGE. Serving!

MISS HEWITT. Young Mr. Ross was there last night. He dances a fair treat.

MISS GEORGE. It isn't 'im by any chance? But there, I serpose I mustn't ask—only I do 'ope, Miss Hewitt, that it isn't 'im. He can dance, I admit, but when you've said that you've said everything. And 'as to 'is teeth, well, they're chronic.

MISS HEWITT. Don't excite yourself, Miss George. It's not Mr. Ross. All the same, he *can* dance.

MISS GEORGE. So can Mr. Nesfield. He asked me for six straight off last Tuesday. That was a stylish 'op if you like, five shillings a head *and* champagne.

MISS HEWITT. His treat, I serpose.

MISS GEORGE. Rather. What do you think? I always was favoured some'ow. He's taking me to the Pav. termorrer. Booked seats. Oh, he's quite the gentleman. I was thinking perhaps he'd speak then. What do *you* say? (*Moves to Miss Hewitt.*)

MISS HEWITT. Well, reely 'ow do I know?

MISS GEORGE. Being engaged yourself I thought you might give a guess. Did I tell you what Mr. Peacock said to me at the dance on Friday?

MISS HEWITT (*who is becoming bored*). No, dear, or if you did I don't remember.

MISS GEORGE. Well, it was like this——

MISS HEWITT. One moment, dear, I think that woman over there wants something. (*Looks off left.*)

MISS GEORGE. Oh, let 'er wait. Mr. Ernest will attend to her. Don't you bother.

MISS HEWITT. We shall have her in the end. Mark my words. May as well get it over.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, let 'er alone. I must say Mr. Ernest is certainly very taking. He looks at me sometimes as if he could read my weary soul through and through.

MISS HEWITT (*annoyed*). Oh, really.

MISS GEORGE. Haven't you ever noticed it?

MISS HEWITT. No, I can't say I have. Per'aps he never wanted ter read my soul.

MISS GEORGE. Very likely not.

(MISS HEWITT *tosses her head*.)

No offence, dear.

MISS HEWITT. Oh, not at all.

MISS GEORGE (*returning to counter R.*). I can't 'elp it if I have a taking way with the gentlemen. Always 'ad some'ow.

MISS HEWITT. Indeed? An' so Mr. Ernest is one of your conquests, is he?

MISS GEORGE. Well, I 'ardly like to mention it. But to tell the truth he's shown me quite clear that he does fancy little me.

MISS HEWITT. In what way may I ask?

MISS GEORGE. Oh, come dear, you can't serpose I'd tell you that. 'Ardly fair, would it be?

MISS HEWITT. Stuck up, thieving cat!

MISS GEORGE (*sharply*). 'Oo dear?

MISS HEWITT. Er—that woman over there.

MISS GEORGE (*meaningly*). Well, dear, *you* ought to know.

MISS HEWITT. Yes, I see enough of them. (*Glaring at MISS GEORGE*.)

CUSTOMER (*off stage*). Do wait, Edward. I only want some ribbon. (*Pause*.) Well, walk up and down outside, if you won't come in. No, really not more than five minutes. (*Pause*.) All right.

MISS HEWITT. Don't mind letting her voice be heard.

MISS GEORGE. No, carries well, don't it?

MISS HEWITT. I should sye so.

MISS GEORGE. That's rather a good-looking feller she's got 'old of. What did she call him? Edward?

MISS HEWITT. Yes, I wouldn't be him for half-a-crown.

MISS GEORGE. Nor I. Rather a nose on him, 'asn't 'e? He isn't as smart as my Mr. Ernest.

MISS HEWITT. *Your* Mr. Ernest?

MISS GEORGE. Well, you know what I mean, dear. (*Smirks.*) He isn't mine yet, so to speak. But no doubt about it he's looking my way. They say he'll be partner some day. What do you think?

MISS HEWITT. I don't trouble my head about what my betters are doing.

MISS GEORGE. No offence, dear.

MISS HEWITT. Oh, none taken.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, bless my 'eart. Here comes that woman.

MISS HEWITT. I told you as much. No! She's stopping at the habby.

MISS GEORGE. Only to paw the goods about. She's *making* for us.

VOICE. What's your pleasure, Madam?

CUSTOMER (*outside*). I want some ribbon, please. I'm in a great hurry.

VOICE (*off*). Yes, Madam. What kind of ribbon?

CUSTOMER. Pale blue satin sash ribbon, about six inches wide. It's to make an Empire sash.

VOICE (*off*). Certainly, Madam. Will you please step this way?

(*Enter Left the CUSTOMER, a good-looking, well-dressed girl, who is in a hurry. MISS HEWITT advances towards her.*)

MISS HEWITT (*in her best manner.*). What did you require, Modam?

CUSTOMER. I want some ribbon, please. I'm in a great hurry.

MISS HEWITT. Certainly, Modam. What kind of ribbon?

CUSTOMER. Blue satin sash ribbon, about six inches wide, quite a sky blue, three-and-a-half yards, for an Empire sash.

MISS HEWITT. Certainly, Modam, will you step this way? Miss George—Ribbons.

CUSTOMER. But I've told you what I want. Can't you serve me? I'm very pressed for time.

MISS HEWITT. If Modam will take a seat, this young lady—

VOICE. Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. Serving! (*Crosses to behind counter c.*)

VOICE. Miss George!

MISS GEORGE. Serving!

(CUSTOMER sits at counter R., her back is to the girls.)

MISS GEORGE (*sotto voce*). I never finished telling you what Mr. Peacock said to me on Friday.

MISS HEWITT (*glancing over a paper-covered novel*). No more you did. Well, go on.

MISS GEORGE. You know that corner by the bandstand—

MISS HEWITT. Yes?

CUSTOMER. Could anybody kindly attend to me, please? I've really no time to spare at all.

MISS HEWITT. Certainly, Modam. I'm engaged for the moment. Miss George—

MISS GEORGE. Well, I'll tell you later on. (*Moves to behind counter R. languidly.*) What did you require, Modam?

CUSTOMER (*becoming irritated*). I want some pale blue satin ribbon, sash ribbon, about so wide, for an Empire sash.

MISS GEORGE. Yes, Modam. Will you 'and me up that box, dear? (*Turning away to MISS HEWITT while fetching box from behind counter c.*) I had on my short skirt with the *ermine* trimming, you know, and the cap to match. I've put a pink gardenia in it and reely it looks very smart.

MISS HEWITT. Shoes are the trouble dancing. I never wear shoes myself. They're so dowdy—that's what I say.

CUSTOMER (*exasperated*). Would you kindly——? I'm in a hurry.

MISS GEORGE (*coming to counter R. with box of pink ribbons*). Certainly, Modam. This is a very nice article. Smart that is—three-three.

CUSTOMER. But I didn't say *pink* ribbon—I said *blue*. Besides, that's not satin at all.

MISS GEORGE. This is what we're selling a lot of just now——

CUSTOMER. Perhaps, but it doesn't happen to be what I want. I want pale blue soft satin about six inches wide——

MISS GEORGE. This is so much more worn.

CUSTOMER (*furious*). I don't care what's worn. Will you kindly get what I want and don't keep me waiting any longer. (*Crosses to door L. and waves off.*)

MISS GEORGE. Dear, dear. (*Going back with box to C. counter.*)

MISS HEWITT. I said she was a stuck-up cat. I saw it in her face.

MISS GEORGE. Some people think they're every one just because they've got a young man with a nose like a knife machine.

MISS HEWITT. She wouldn't put on so many airs if she knew her petticoat's showing.

CUSTOMER (*returning as MISS GEORGE crosses back to counter*). Have you my ribbon yet?

MISS GEORGE. In one moment, Modam. What price did you say?

CUSTOMER. Oh, I don't mind. Just show me what you've got.

MISS GEORGE. They run from six-three to three and eleven, don't they, Miss Hewitt?

MISS HEWITT. About that.

CUSTOMER. Well, show me them, please.

MISS GEORGE. Certainly, Modam. Where did you say they was, dear?

MISS HEWITT. Top drawer left. I'll help you.

CUSTOMER (*in despair*). Oh, dear, oh, dear!

VOICE (*off*). Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. Serving.

VOICE. Miss George!

MISS GEORGE. Serving.

MISS HEWITT. Well, what did Mr. Peacock say at the dance? You never told me.

MISS GEORGE. Nor I did. Well, we'd just got to that corner, you know, by the bandstand——

MISS HEWITT. Right 'and side?

MISS GEORGE. Yes.

MISS HEWITT. Why, that's where Mr. Er——(*coughs*) That's where my fiancy asked me to marry him.

MISS GEORGE. Never!

MISS HEWITT. Fact, I assure you.

CUSTOMER (*rising*). Would you please attend to me, or do you wish me to remain here all night?

MISS HEWITT. Oh, no, Modam.

CUSTOMER. Well then, please be quick! (*Goes to door.*) Edward! One moment! No, don't go, only a moment really——(*Returning.*) Now, where are those ribbons?

MISS GEORGE (*loftily*). They're here, Modam.

CUSTOMER. At last! These are very narrow. Are they the widest you have?

MISS GEORGE. Are they the widest, Miss Hewitt?

VOICE. Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. Serving! What say?

MISS GEORGE. Are those the widest?

MISS HEWITT. Yes, I believe so.

CUSTOMER. Well, I suppose this must do. There, that one. Three and a half yards, please. Do be quick.

(MISS GEORGE *slowly measures the ribbon.*)

There's a pound. Never mind putting the ribbon in paper. Oh, please be quick.

(MISS GEORGE *enters the transaction in her book*, CUSTOMER *takes ribbon*, MISS GEORGE *exits*. *Pause*. CUSTOMER *very impatient, crosses L. and back again*. MISS HEWITT *leans negligently on the counter and hums a topical song.*)

CUSTOMER. Do you think you could ask the young lady to hurry up?

MISS HEWITT (*coldly*). She is getting your change, Madam.

CUSTOMER. Change. Oh yes, I know, but couldn't she be a little quicker?

MISS HEWITT. Coming, dear? The lady's in a hurry.

MISS GEORGE (*returning. Haughtily*). 5s. 6d., 6s., 10, 20. (*Handing change.*)

CUSTOMER. Thanks. (*Bolting for the door.*) Edward! Edward! (*Exit off.*) Oh, he's gone!

MISS GEORGE. Gone, has he? Dear, dear.

MISS HEWITT. Knew he had. Saw him set off like mad five minutes ago. I don't blame him for one.

MISS GEORGE. Nor I. Cat, I call her.

VOICE (*off R.*). Miss George! Cash wants you.

MISS GEORGE. Oh lor! What's up now?

MISS HEWITT. Don't suppose it's anything. I'll tidy your box.

MISS GEORGE. Thanks, dear. (*Goes off, returns.*) Wonder if I shall 'appen to catch sight of Mr. Ernest? (*A pause.*) I might, mightn't I?

MISS HEWITT (*annoyed*). Oh, do push off.

(MISS GEORGE *exits.*)

VOICE (*off. In a different voice, subdued and secretive*). Miss Hewitt——

MISS HEWITT (*to herself*). It's Alastair! (*runs to door L.*) Yes, Mr. Ernest?

VOICE (*off*). Marguerite! Is it all right for the Hippodrome to-night?

MISS HEWITT. Rather!

VOICE (*off*). Six-thirty sharp at the Troc then——

MISS HEWITT. Right oh! Look out! Miss George is coming back!

VOICE (*off*). By-bye!

(MISS GEORGE, *who is in a dreadful upset, comes rushing on the stage from R. entrance.*)

MISS GEORGE. Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. What's the matter?

MISS GEORGE. Oh, Miss Hewitt, stop her, stop her.

MISS HEWITT. Stop who ?

MISS GEORGE. Why, that woman. Did she go anywhere else in the shop ?

MISS HEWITT. Blue ribbon Empire, d'you mean ?

MISS GEORGE. Yes, yes.

MISS HEWITT. Why she went out of sight ages ago.

MISS GEORGE. Out of sight ! (*Passing her.*)

MISS HEWITT. Yes. Run after her feller. What d'yer want her for ?

MISS GEORGE. She's given me a bad pound note.

MISS HEWITT. Never.

MISS GEORGE. Yes, she has. You see I never looked at it with her bustling me up so, and the cashier hadn't put it away so he knew it was the one I brought.

MISS HEWITT. My dear ! Well, there, I feel struck all of a heap. (*Sits R.*)

MISS GEORGE. You could have knocked me down with a feather when they told me. I 'aven't 'arf 'ad a row, I can tell you. She did it on purpose, of course—the stuck-up, over-dressed, pinched-in minx !

MISS HEWITT. What are they going ter do about it ?

MISS GEORGE. Do ? Why, I shall have to pay up, of course. That's the rule of the house, isn't it ? I wish I had her here. I'd pull her powdered nose.

MISS HEWITT. She may not have known.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, she *knew* right enough. A lot of clattering bangles, and sapphires, and false hair, all bought with my money.

MISS HEWITT. 'Ardly that, dear. It's only a pound after all.

MISS GEORGE. Only a pound indeed, Miss Hewitt ! I wish you had to pay up, not me, if that's the way you talk. (*Crosses L.*)

MISS HEWITT. No offence, Miss George. I feel for you, reely I do.

MISS GEORGE (*crosses C.*). In she comes with her pale blue Empire sashes, "Could any one attend to me ? I'm in a great hurry."

(MISS HEWITT *laughs.*)

MISS HEWITT. Oh, my dear, you are a actress!

MISS GEORGE. In a great hurry! So she was—to pinch my pound.

MISS HEWITT. My dear! Remember you're a lady.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, I desay, but that don't give me back my money. They're spending it now, she and Edward. Sitting opposite each other at the Corner House, they are, ordering steak and kidney pudding with stewed prunes to follow—on my money! The caterpillars!

MISS HEWITT. Perhaps she'll come in here again and then we can get hold of her.

MISS GEORGE. Not she! She knows how many beans make five! Oh, dear! Oh dear! (*Sits chair c.*).

MISS HEWITT. What did he say to you about it—the cashier, I mean?

MISS GEORGE. Told me to report to Mr. Ernest.

MISS HEWITT. To Mr. Ernest? (*Rises.*)

MISS GEORGE. Yes.

MISS HEWITT (*crossing stage thoughtfully to L.*). To Mr. Ernest!

MISS GEORGE (*sharply*). Well, what's there so queer about that? It's the rule, isn't it?

MISS HEWITT. Yes, but something's set me thinking. (*Crosses c. to Miss G.*) As Mr. Ernest is so partial ter you and you can twist him round your little finger I don't see what you've got ter be afraid of.

MISS GEORGE. Why? (*Arises.*)

MISS HEWITT. Why? He'll get you off, that's all. You haven't got anything to fret about that I can see—don't know what's troubling you myself. (*Very pointedly.*)

MISS GEORGE (*turns away from her to R.*). Oh, Miss Hewitt—

MISS HEWITT. Yes, dear.

MISS GEORGE. To tell you the truth I was only having a bit of fun about Mr. Ernest.

MISS HEWITT. What!!

MISS GEORGE. He's never looked my way reely.

MISS HEWITT. Never read your weary soul?

MISS GEORGE. No, never. It was all my eye—so you see *he* won't help me.

MISS HEWITT. You swear to that?

MISS GEORGE. Suttinly.

MISS HEWITT. That's all right!

(MISS GEORGE *looks up in surprise.*)

MISS GEORGE. What do you mean?

MISS HEWITT. I mean in that case perhaps *I* might be of some use.

MISS GEORGE. I 'ardly see what you can do.

MISS HEWITT. I've got an idea, that's all, but I can't tell you just yet what it is.

MISS GEORGE. You're very secretive. (*Sits R.*) If you reely do know a way to help you might pass it along—I don't want to lay awake all night, I'm sure.

MISS HEWITT. Well, my dear, it's all mixed up like with my engagement.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, indeed?

MISS HEWITT. Yes, and that's why I can't let on about it yet.

MISS GEORGE. Just as you please, of course. I can't say you've given me much ground to stand upon, so to speak——

(*Pause. Shutters are fixed, off stage.*)

Well, they're shutting up. I must go and put my hat on. (*Rises, crosses L.*)

MISS HEWITT. I reely can help you.

MISS GEORGE. I'm sure your *intentions* are most kind.

MISS HEWITT (*annoyed*). You think I can't?

MISS GEORGE. I confess I don't see 'ow.

MISS HEWITT (*crosses R.*). Some people can't see the length of their noses, but, well, I can show you're wrong. It's early ter speak of it yet, and Alastair, he wanted it kept private for a bit——

MISS GEORGE. Alastair!

MISS HEWITT. Yes. He and me are engaged.

MISS GEORGE. Alastair! D'you mean Mr. Ernest?

MISS HEWITT. Certainly. He asked me last Thursday week.

MISS GEORGE (*quite unbelievably*). Mr. Ernest! You engaged to Mr. Ernest! Oh, reely Miss Hewitt!

MISS HEWITT. You think I'm romancing?

MISS GEORGE. Oh, I daresay he's spoke a kind word to you now and again.

MISS HEWITT. Oh, really Miss George, you'd try the patience of an image, that you would. 'Owever, seeing's believing—'Ow's that for a ring?

MISS GEORGE (*taking it condescendingly*). Very 'and-some, but no proof that I can see.

MISS HEWITT. Just cast your eye round the interior *if* you please.

MISS GEORGE (*crosses R. reading*). "Alastair to Marguerite." Alastair! It's as true as I'm born. (*Returns the ring.*)

MISS HEWITT (L.C.) So you see it was a bit slighting to my feelings when you implied what you did.

MISS GEORGE (R.C.) Oh, don't, Miss Hewitt! You've made me feel for all the world like a remnant, that you have. I didn't intend any implication.

MISS HEWITT. Well, you must own that there's bin a double entong about all your remarks.

MISS GEORGE. Quite an oversight, Miss Hewitt. I ask pardon, I'm sure.

MISS HEWITT. Granted.

MISS GEORGE. I reely must offer my congratulations. Mr. Ernest! Why, he's almost manager.

MISS HEWITT. Quite so, so I think you'll agree that I'm not so much of a down-trodden worm as can't lift the head to help a lady in distress.

MISS GEORGE. No indeed!

MISS HEWITT. Well, dear, shall I speak to him for you?

MISS GEORGE. Well, dear, if you would be so kind—but I'm afraid I've offended your feelings too much.

MISS HEWITT. Not at all, dear. I was never one to bear malice, and between one lady and another there

should always be an entente cordial. Come along, Miss George, we'll go to him now.

MISS GEORGE. Oh, Miss Hewitt ! Marguerite ! (*Embraces her.*)

MISS HEWITT. That's all right. Mind my back 'air !

CURTAIN.

Continued from second page of cover.

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